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# Prague Prologue

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The Week That Was  
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It is Thursday, the day before the Pro Tour, and 411 players have signed up for the Last Chance Qualifier for the remaining four opportunities to qualify for this weekend's tournament – which very likely is under way by the time you read this.



There are more than a few notable names on the LCQ sign-up sheet. Steve O'Mahoney-Schwartz and Nicolai Herzog were two names that I knew were going to be playing when I wrote my [preview article](#) but a few more Pro Tour veterans have shown up to give this format a try. Both Steve and Nico are both former Limited Pro Tour winners. Steve OMS won in Los Angeles during the 1998-99 season after falling in the finals of Pro Tour-Mainz to Matt Place the season previous. His opposition in the finals of L.A. was nothing to sneeze at either, as he had to get past none other than Jon Finkel to hoist his only Pro Tour trophy.

Nicolai's wins are of a somewhat more recent vintage and against some of the toughest Top 8 fields of all time. During the 2003 season, Herzog finished second a Pro Tour Chicago sandwiched in the final standings between Finkel and a triumphant Kai Budde. The following season Nicolai closed the deal twice. The first time was in San Diego with a Top 8 that included Antoine Ruel, Anton Jonsson, Mike Turian, Masashi Oiso, and a then-unknown Mark Herberholz. He won following Limited Pro Tour in Amsterdam again thwarting Turian and Jonsson as well as Olivier Ruel in their quests for a title.

On the strength of those two victories, Nicolai headed into Worlds with a narrow lead in the Player of Year Race. After a solid Day One leading into the Limited portion of the weekend, he seemed like a lock for the title barring a meltdown from the best Limited player on the planet.

Nicolai stumbled and the relentless Gabriel Nassif won a very well-deserved Player of the Year title. His Top 8 finish was the third of the season for Nassif. Nicolai felt the pull of adulthood and without the airfare that accompanied the Player of the Year winner, he could not justify his continued presence on the Pro Tour. With the exception of the brief cameo in London, he has rarely been seen on Tour since. His absence is one of the most compelling arguments in favor of the Players Club system, which supplanted the old end-of-the-year payout.

Herzog has had the fever of late and tried frantically to earn an invite on the Qualifier circuit. He fell short of the mark and as of this writing was registering a deck for the largest LCQ in the history of the Pro Tour.

"It is a really tough deck," sighed Herzog as he used up every single minute of the deck registration period to hone the final construction. He could easily have been pulled in three different directions and finally settled on a red-green-blue build that splashed white for **Lightning Helix** and **Faith's Fetters**. He had two bombs for Sealed Deck in **Master Warcraft** and **Savage Twister**. The latter card, along with the crucial **Civic Wayfinder**, could not allow him to shift away from green into any other builds.

Here is what he had to work with staring down the barrel of a 10-round tournament – with an attendance bigger than Grand Prix-Cardiff. I will post his deck build a little further down in the article after you have a chance to ponder what you would have built.

## Nicolai Herzog, Last Chance Qualifier Card Pool

### White

- 1 Boros Fury-Shield
- 1 Chant of Vitu-Ghazi

### Blue

- 1 Drake Familiar
- 1 Flight of Fancy

### Black

- 1 Dimir House Guard
- 1 Sadistic Augermage

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1 Faith's Fetters  
 1 Gate Hound  
 1 Leave No Trace  
 1 Loxodon Gatekeeper  
 1 Veteran Armorer  
 1 Votary of the Conclave  
 1 Belfry Spirit  
 1 Lionheart Maverick  
 1 Shrieking Grottesque  
 1 Withstand

1 Halcyon Glaze  
 1 Snapping Drake  
 1 Surveilling Sprite  
 1 Terraformer  
 1 Crystal Seer  
 1 Frazzle  
 1 Gigadrowse  
 1 Steamcore Weird

1 Shred Memory  
 1 Cryptwailing  
 1 Hissing Miasma  
 1 Necromancer's Magemark  
 1 Restless Bones

**Red**

1 Dogpile  
 1 Goblin Spelunkers  
 1 Rain of Embers  
 1 Sabertooth Alley Cat  
 1 Surge of Zeal  
 1 Viashino Fangtail  
 1 War-Torch Goblin  
 2 Ogre Savant  
 1 Tin Street Hooligan

**Green**

1 Civic Wayfinder  
 1 Dowsing Shaman  
 1 Golgari Brownscale  
 1 Goliath Spider  
 1 Greater Mossdog  
 1 Overwhelm  
 1 Scatter the Seeds  
 1 Storm-Seeder Hierophant  
 1 Bioplasm  
 1 Ghor-Clan Savage  
 1 Silhana Starfletcher  
 1 Skarrgan Pit-Skulk  
 1 Wildsize

**Gold**

1 Flame-Kin Zealot  
 1 Lightning Helix  
 1 Seeds of Strength  
 1 Sisters of Stone Death  
 1 Watchwolf  
 1 Blind Hunter  
 1 Burning-Tree Bloodscale  
 1 Castigate  
 1 Savage Twister  
 1 Wee Dragonauts

**Artifact**

1 Golgari Signet  
 1 Peregrine Mask  
 1 Spectral Searchlight  
 1 Gruul Signet  
 1 Moratorium Stone  
 1 Orzhov Signet

**Land**

1 Golgari Rot Farm  
 1 Selesnya Sanctuary

**Hybrid**

1 Gaze of the Gorgon  
 1 Lurking Informant  
 1 Master Warcraft  
 1 Izzet Guildmage  
 1 Petrahydrox

"I don't know if it is going to be powerful enough to withstand ten rounds of Sealed," lamented the two-time Limited Champion as he stood on line to hand in his deck sheet. "It has a shot so I will probably be playing until 2 a.m. before it is time to get drunk."

When asked what were the most important things about *Ravnica-Guildpact* sealed, he said it was hard to say.

"I have played a lot of Sealed Deck in my career but this particular format is like no other. Either you get powerful decks with bad mana or you get consistent decks. I think the consistent decks lose to the powerful decks so I think you are looking for power but it is hard to make a general statement about decks in this format.

"I think I have a consistent deck that is not powerful enough but still has quite a few power cards," Nico concluded. "We will see though. I could have either gone for white-green-red or blue-green-red maybe even red-white-blue – or even green-red-white splashing blue. I had a couple of options and they were so equal that it was hard to choose. They all seemed a little clunky so this one seemed like the least clunky. I had to make a lot of card cuts and I finished with no time left on the clock."



The LCQ filled up half of Szarka Arena.

Of course not many of the players in the tournament have had as much experience playing with the pressure mounting round after round. Nicolai should have some edge there against the largely local and much less-experienced field.

"Experience will be important and I hope it can carry me past the power decks," prayed Herzog.

**Nicolai Herzog**  
 Last Chance Qualifier - Sealed Deck Build

Main Deck 40 cards	Sideboard
4 Forest 6 Island 4 Mountain 1 Plains 1 Selesnya Sanctuary 16 lands 1 Bioplasm 1 Civic Wayfinder 1 Ghor-Clan Savage 1 Greater Mossdog 1 Izzet Guildmage 1 Lurking Informant	1 Belfry Spirit 1 Blind Hunter 1 Boros Fury-Shield 1 Burning-Tree Bloodscale 1 Castigate 1 Chant of Vitu-Ghazi 1 Cryptwailing 1 Crystal Seer 1 Dimir House Guard 1 Dogpile 1 Dowsing Shaman 1 Drake Familiar 1 Flame-Kin Zealot 1 Frazzle 1 Gate Hound
1 Faith's Fetters 1 Flight of Fancy 1 Gruul Signet 1 Halcyon Glaze 1 Lightning Helix 1 Master Warcraft 1 Savage Twister 1 Spectral Searchlight 1 Wildsize 9 other spells	

2 Ogre Savant	1 Gaze of the Gorgon
1 Snapping Drake	1 Gigadrowse
1 Steamcore Weird	1 Goblin Spelunkers
1 Surveilling Sprite	1 Golgari Brownscale
1 Terraformer	1 Golgari Rot Farm
1 Tin Street Hooligan	1 Golgari Signet
1 Viashino Fangtail	1 Goliath Spider
1 Wee Dragonauts	1 Hissing Miasma
	1 Leave No Trace
15 creatures	1 Lionheart Maverick
	1 Loxodon Gatekeeper
	1 Moratorium Stone
	1 Necromancer's Magemark
	1 Orzhov Signet
	1 Overwhelm
	1 Peregrine Mask
	1 Petrahydrox
	1 Rain of Embers
	1 Restless Bones
	1 Sabertooth Alley Cat
	1 Sadistic Augermage
	1 Scatter the Seeds
	1 Seeds of Strength
	1 Shred Memory
	1 Shrieking Grottesque
	1 Silhana Starfletcher
	1 Sisters of Stone Death
	1 Skarrgan Pit-Skulk
	1 Stone-Seeder Hierophant
	1 Surge of Zeal
	1 Veteran Armorer
	1 Votary of the Conclave
	1 War-Torch Goblin
	1 Watchwolf
	1 Withstand
	50 sideboard cards

Nicolai and Steve OMS are not the only two former Pro Tour winners taking part in this Thursday field. Pro Tour-Yokohama winner Mattias Jorstedt was also sweating a card pool along with Pro Tour New Orleans winner – and third-place finisher in that same Player of the Year race that Nico fell just short of winning – Rickard Osterberg. Quick side note about Yokohama ... it was the last time Jon Finkel appeared in the Top 8 of a Pro Tour.

## Looking ahead to next week...

Fifteen of next week's 16 Invitationalists will be flying straight to Los Angeles on Monday to take part in the annual all-star game. The first format they will be tackling – partially anyway – is the bidding war in the Auction of the Geniuses. Eighteen deck designers from all aspects of the game created Online Classic decks to be used in conjunction with Vanguard Avatars of their choosing.

The creators come from a wide cross section of the game that includes old-schooler Jamie Wakefield, Friggord spawner John "Friggin" Rizzo, Vintage master Steven Menendian, Standard-setting Resident Genius Mike Flores, House of Cards tenants past and present Chris Millar, JMS and Mark Gottlieb, as well as last year's Resident Genius Tsuyoshi Fujita, and Itaru Ishida (the man behind Kenji Tsumura) – just to name a few.

The players will bid on each deck with a series of bids based on life and hand size. The default starting bid for each deck is 8 cards and 25 life. Players may bid in lower increments with hand size trumping life total. For example, a bid of 8 cards and 1 life would be outdone by a bid of 7 cards and 25 life. Each player's final hand size and life total will be further modified by the stats of the Avatar associate with the deck they end up with.

Without further ado, I welcome you to a [preview of the decks](#) in question. You can play around with them by clicking on the sample hand generator in the upper right hand corner of each deck listing. Keep in mind the modifications and abilities of each avatar.

## Firestarter: How much would you pay?

After looking at the Auction of the Geniuses decks, do you have any advice for the players in this year's Invitational? Do any of the decks look especially spicy to you? Do you understand what they are each supposed to do? Share your thoughts, opinions, and bidding strategies on the forums by clicking on the 'discuss' button below – and don't forget to check out the coverage of [Pro Tour-Prague!](#)

*Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is [Top8Magic.com](#), the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



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